United Nations

A/S-19/PV.9

General Assembly

Nineteenth Special Session

Official Records

9th plenary meeting
Friday, 27 June 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail . . . . . (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Moore (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21

The Acting President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia.

Mrs. Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mrs. Njie-Saidy (Gambia): The commitment of the Gambia to sustainable environmental management was formalized as early as 1977, in the formulation and adoption of what we call the Banjul Declaration. In that document we embraced the rational exploitation and utilization of our flora and fauna. Since then, however, the precautionary, efficiency and intergenerational-equity principles have influenced both policies and programmes in the natural resources and environmental sectors.

It was therefore not surprising that we went to Rio with a developed National Environmental Action Plan. This provided the framework to indigenize Agenda 21 and the international conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification and drought.

The National Environmental Action Plan is set within and encapsulated in the Programme for Sustainable Development. It takes into account the demographic picture of the country, the mainstreaming of women and the social sectors of health and education as they impinge on the environment. The National Vision 2020 document also takes a long-term view of environmental concerns. The institutional arrangements to enforce and implement the provisions of the Rio instruments include, for example, an executive council, an agency, technical networks and functional working groups built on the programmes for implementation. The implementation process has so far established an efficient and effective regulatory, policy and coordination framework and a committed and indeed increasingly aware stakeholder constituency.

We are, however, constrained by institutional weaknesses. These range from inadequate skills in project planning, implementation and monitoring to environmental policy analysis, impact assessment and environment legislation, among other areas.

Inadequate support systems in the form of donor inflexibility, for example, and limited capacity for decentralization also pose additional problems. We have, however, learned valuable lessons as we endeavour to transform these constraints into opportunities for improvement. A bottom-up approach enhances sustainability in environmental management, and joint action through periodic participatory reviews and monitoring, for example, has been an effective tool to elicit and incorporate feedback into policy and programme planning and implementation.

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The Gambia ratified both the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the international Convention on Biological Diversity in June 1994, and the Convention to Combat Desertification in January 1996. With regard to the implementation of the Climate Change Convention, we have compiled a national inventory of sources and sinks of greenhouse gas emissions in the Gambia. The report indicates that land-use change and the forestry sector are currently the highest emitters of trace gases in the Gambia, with annual net emissions of 1.6 million tons of carbon dioxide, and overall results show that more carbon dioxide is emitted than any other gas, with a total emission level of more than 1.8 million tons.

A study on the Gambia's vulnerability to climate change has also established that economic sectors such as crop production, range and livestock, water resources, forestry and natural terrestrial ecosystems, fisheries and coastal resources, as affected by the sea level, are potential victims. Also under study are management measures and policy options to mitigate the predicted effects of greenhouse gas emissions. These will be translated into policy objectives and programmes for the sustainable management and utilization of our climate system in the Gambia.

The thrust of the Gambia's implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity resides in the creation of a protected area system. To date, four protected areas and two wetland sites have been identified and gazetted. Plans are also in progress to designate and protect other ecologically sensitive and representative sites. Our ultimate aim in the Gambia, therefore, is to bring about 5 per cent of the total land areas of the country under protected areas. Our ultimate aim will be facilitated by a country study to map out our biodiversity endowments as a whole. The Global Environment Facility provided funds for this purpose in July 1996 and work was begun in earnest in December.

The implementation of the provisions of the Convention to Combat Desertification has, *inter alia*, entailed a review of the forest policy, with revisions calling for extensive public and private sector participation in the programmes. Local communities can now own and manage their own natural forests. For consistency, we have also revisited the Forest Act and Regulations in a participatory process. A similar national consultative process has been set in motion to elaborate a national action plan for desertification control, which will be harmonized with the initiatives to implement the Biodiversity and Climate Change Conventions. In the interim, however, through community forestry, more than 10,000 hectares of land, particularly forest land, is being managed by local communities in the Gambia. Our intention is to put at least 50 per cent of all national forest lands under community ownership and management.

The issue of poverty was perhaps one of the most important concerns under Agenda 21. In this connection, the Gambia is currently implementing a Strategy for Poverty Alleviation to improve the lives of vulnerable groups in particular and ordinary Gambians in general. A corresponding National Poverty Alleviation Programme has been developed for the first cycle of the Strategy, from 1996 to 1999. Important elements in this Strategy include the development of gender-sensitive food-security policies and improvements in the agricultural sector to enhance the increase of disposable incomes. This is all aimed at generating increased demand for non-agricultural goods and services and ultimately, of course, to stimulate growth in the rural economy in the Gambia. The programme has a rural credit and micro-credit component for small-scale enterprises. It also aims to develop human resources through education, training and support to primary health care delivery.

When we entered these contracts at Rio, of our own free will, we were all well aware that we did not control all the relevant variables to weave together our economic, social and environmental policies and programmes to ensure sustainability in development. This certainty is indeed rare at the level of individual Governments, let alone in a situation of partnership between Governments of developed and developing countries. This uncertainty, however, also provides the *raison d'être* for this nineteenth special session, to ascertain critically the inroads we have made and the hurdles we have yet to overcome.

Nevertheless, we all pledged our collective will and common resolve to implement the provisions of the contracts which we freely entered into at Rio. The difficult and protracted negotiations and the intellectual, expert and statesmanlike efforts that made these agreements possible reflected the goodwill and good faith of all Governments concerned. The ratification and effectiveness of these instruments sealed our epoch-making agreements.

However, the constraints cited as obstacles to implementation during this review session tend to indicate the persistence of the contentious and also cross-cutting issues of additional financial resources, technology

transfer, information sharing, training and institutional capacity-building and the unfulfillment of our differentiated responsibilities under these provisions.

In this connection, the Gambia fully endorses the position of the Organization of African Unity and of the Group of 77 and China on these clusters of issues, as expressed in the statements of His Excellency the President of Zimbabwe and His Excellency the President of Tanzania who are also the respective Chairmen of the Organization of African Unity and of the Group of 77 and China. Specifically, we advocate increased official development assistance, more transparent and democratic financial mechanisms, the transfer of suitable and environmentally benign technologies on concessional terms, the reorientation of technical cooperation to respond to the forces of demand in developing countries in such a way as to utilize and build indigenous expertise, the development of human resources and an improvement in the management systems and processes that run our institutions. Thus, while we do not advocate a renegotiation of these issues, it is imperative that we rekindle the spirit of Rio and muster the will and the courage to work — to work as genuine and committed partners towards the attainment of its lofty ideals, both in the interest of the present generation and that of our children and grandchildren and generations to follow.

Let us remember that we hold this earth in trust for them and should be accountable to them.

The Acting President: I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia for her statement.

Mrs. Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice-President of the Republic of the Gambia was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable William Harrington, MP, Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Zambia.

The Honourable William Harrington, MP, Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Zambia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Harrington (Zambia): Allow me in the first instance, on behalf of the delegation of Zambia and indeed on my own behalf, to join other countries in congratulating the President on his election to preside over the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly on the review and appraisal of Agenda 21. Our thanks and deep appreciation also go to the Secretary-General for having steered successfully the preparations for this session.

On our road to Rio, Zambia made an assessment of its prospects for environment and development integration. Our report to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development identified the fact that many environmental problems in Zambia arose as externalities to the process of development and that these environmental problems could be overcome only through the process of development itself. It is this assessment that led us to have a strong conviction as to the principles and goals of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, especially Agenda 21.

During the five years since Rio, there have been successes and failures at both national and international levels in implementing the concept of sustainable development. In Zambia, we have undertaken significant steps to implement the Rio consensus. Zambia has so far ratified all the conventions negotiated at Rio and since then.

At the policy level, we have continued to build on our National Environment Action Plan, which we elaborated in 1994, expanding it to make it more encompassing of all the aspects of Agenda 21. Zambia, however, still hopes to elaborate a distinct national Agenda 21 in order to deal with sustainable development issues in a more coordinated way. Our Environment Action Plan has identified six main areas for action, namely deforestation, land degradation, water pollution, inadequate sanitation, air pollution and the depletion of wildlife resources.

Deforestation continues to be a major problem, especially around peri-urban areas due to the exploitation of forests to use their wood as fuel. Sensitive woodland areas also continue to be threatened. Efforts to increase agricultural productivity are hampered by land degradation, the resource base upon which crop and livestock production is based. The incidence of drought, which has been prevalent in the 1990s, has further contributed to environmental degradation.

Poverty in Zambia, just as in most developing countries, is the single most important factor undermining sustainable development and compromising prospects for future economic growth. The socio-economic dimensions of development are the underlying cause of the degradation of natural resources. In Zambia, a number of

poverty-reduction strategies were put in place before and after Rio. Despite these concerted efforts, millions of Zambians continue to live in poverty. It is our view that this issue cannot be dealt with merely as a local matter. It requires both local and international solutions, given the nature of the globalization of world economies.

Except for two years since Rio, Zambia has been unable to register positive growth in its gross domestic product, despite my Government's very determined effort to put in place comprehensive reform measures in the private and public sectors. These reforms are expected to lead to economic growth in the future. There are, however, associated adverse effects of these reforms, which has made it difficult for the Government to increase expenditure on social services such as education, health and water, thereby negatively affecting the poor who are the most vulnerable group. In order to survive, this group turns to the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, thereby causing further environmental degradation which, in turn, contributes further to their poverty status.

The other important issue related to poverty in Zambia is external indebtedness. Zambia is currently carrying an unsustainable external debt of over $6 billion. This translates to 204 per cent of gross national product. Although a number of creditor countries have assisted with bilateral debt relief, there is still a greater and urgent need for a durable solution to the debt issue, including multilateral debt.

The problem of declining official development assistance and the almost non-existent appropriate technology transfer has negative repercussions on environmental management and poverty reduction. The promise made at Rio to increase official development assistance has, to a large extent, been unfulfilled, despite having put in place appropriate measures to create an enabling environment for investment that included the enactment of an investment law and the creation of an investment centre to provide investors with a "one-stop" service facility.

Zambia notes, however, with great pleasure the announcements of pledges made by the European Union and other countries to increase official development assistance to developing countries, especially those in Africa. It is the hope of my delegation that these commitments will be fulfilled.

I have taken time to talk about the challenges posed by these socio-economic factors to our sustainable development efforts in order to underline the fact that the past five years may not have been enough to reverse the trends that have been shaped for decades. We hope to see the next five years have a real positive impact on national and international efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Despite our readiness to forge ahead in our efforts for sustainable development, we foresee a number of hurdles that need to be overcome. The strategy should be to revisit some of the implementation issues, especially science and technology, trade and environment and financing of sustainable development. Once these issues are addressed, it is our hope that we shall be able to move forward with the confidence that sustainable development is indeed attainable.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm Zambia's commitment to the spirit of Rio. There is as great a need for us to implement Agenda 21 now as there was in 1992. Let us move forward with greater determination. The political will of my Government cannot be doubted and Zambia will play its part in the full implementation of Agenda 21.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Zambia.

The Honourable William Harrington, M.P., Minister of the Environment and Natural Resources of Zambia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I would like to appeal to remaining speakers to respect the limit of seven minutes for their statements.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alpha Ibrahima Diallo, Minister of Communication and Culture of Guinea.

Mr. Alpha Ibrahima Diallo, Minister of Communication and Culture of Guinea, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Diallo (Guinea) (*interpretation from French*): It is with real pleasure that I join my voice to those who have spoken to welcome the convening of this special session of the General Assembly on environment and sustainable development. My delegation feels that this session represents an important phase in our collective consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of our

common action to implement Agenda 21 in light of the commitments we have undertaken.

In this regard, we are compelled to note that, despite the various professions of faith expressed, achievements have fallen well short of our hopes. This has become a source of real concern today about the will of the industrialized countries to display a spirit of solidarity and to cooperate in the international community's struggle for the environment and sustainable development, the wellspring of progress and well-being for all. That is why my delegation greatly appreciates the convening of this session, whose recommendations will enrich and consolidate the progress made by the international community in its efforts to attain sustainable development.

In the framework of development policy for the entire rural sector, Guinea has made considerable planning efforts through a series of sectoral plans, including those for health, population, housing, communication and culture. In this context, environmental action is a priority and environmental policy aims at optimizing the economic and social system in its entirety on two broad fronts: the management of renewable natural resources and the improvement of living standards through the reduction of poverty and balancing of inequalities.

In practice, Guinea's environmental protection policy is an updated frame of reference for all sectors striving for the goals envisaged. Following the Rio Summit, the Government made great efforts to meet its challenges, though these efforts were limited by budgetary constraints. In response to all these concerns, my Government created the Ministry of the Environment and then drafted a National Plan of Action for the Environment that constitutes our national Agenda 21. This National Plan of Action, developed after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, takes into account both the principles laid out in the Rio Declaration as well as our national realities. Moreover, it prescribes international and subregional cooperation based on solidarity among peoples.

Guinea's efforts in the various spheres of socio-economic development are enumerated in a report on this subject, entitled *Sectoral Policy for the Environment*. Furthermore, a policy paper on population has already been drafted, based on six main objectives: the control of demographic growth; the improvement of the status of women, allowing them to contribute more actively to socio-economic development; the promotion of information, education and communications on population issues; improved living conditions for the vulnerable strata of society; the protection and conservation of the environment with a view to guaranteeing a decent future for generations to come; and the improvement of the institutional and technical capacities of the services responsible for collecting and analyzing demographic data.

Within the framework of the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, among other priorities, the protection of natural resources and the conservation of bio-diversity are at the core of Guinea's National Plan of Action for the environment. Thus, in the twofold perspective of implementing this environmental action plan and of its international commitments, Guinea has undertaken the development of a national monograph on bio-diversity.

With the support of the United Nations Environment Programme and financing from the Global Environment Facility, Guinea has tried to close this gap by drafting this national monograph on bio-diversity in two phases. The first consists of assembling and analyzing the documentary evidence of all available and accessible information, while the second phase will include a territorial inventory and a definition of conservation strategies and sustainable uses for our bio-diversity, as well as the elaboration of action plans and implementation programmes.

As to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, with the technical and financial support of the United Nations Environment Programme we are currently considering the elaboration of national communications and an implementation project for the Convention.

My country signed and ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. A National Committee for joint action in the implementation of the Convention, made up of representatives of all Government agencies and civil society, is responsible for drafting a work programme with the support of an interim secretariat. It is organizing seminars to disseminate information and enhance awareness of this Convention, which remains one of the important achievements of the Rio Summit.

These are the main activities undertaken by the Government of Guinea to follow up and implement Agenda 21. I wish to reiterate my Government's support for the tireless efforts of the international community to

follow up and implement Agenda 21 and I urge the industrialized countries to work harder on behalf of the environment and development.

I wish to conclude by citing the example of the initiatives taken by the International Olympic Committee and its President, Ambassador Juan António Samaranch, to forge links between the goals of the Olympic Movement and those of environmental protection.

In order to safeguard the environment in a responsible manner, the International Olympic Committee has made environmental concerns one of the core elements of the Olympic movement. Not only must the organizers of international sports events take these concerns into account, but a city's record on environmental protection and the concrete measures it has taken to that end constitute a fundamental criterion in its selection as host of the Olympic Games. This explains the fruitful cooperation between the International Olympic Committee and all international organizations and relevant political and private authorities in the sphere of the environment.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Communication and Culture of Guinea.

Mr. Alpha Ibrahima Diallo, Minister of Communication and Culture of Guinea, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Highness Mr. Turki Bin Mohammed Al-Kabir, Director-General of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia.

His Highness Mr. Turki Bin Mohammed Al-Kabir, Director-General of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Al-Kabir (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to congratulate Mr. Razali Ismail on his election to the presidency of this special session and to wish him every success.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia brings to this meeting a solid track record that reflects its policies as a member of the international community that aspires to develop its economy, protect its infrastructure and diversify its sources of income.

We share with the developing countries their aspirations and their sufferings as they pursue their development efforts. In this regard, I should like to comment on the policies and programmes of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the environmental and developmental areas. Based on the principles of our Islamic religion, they advocate that building for the good of humanity is man's basic function on this earth. For this reason, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia focuses on benefiting from its natural resources and the environment by using them to meet its current needs without affecting future generations and their right to sufficient resources.

Sustainable development and the protection of the environment is a primary concern of the Government of the custodian of the two holy mosques, at the national, regional and international levels. Our basic law of governance ensures the preservation and development of the environment and its protection from pollution.

The Kingdom has striven, through the Ministerial Committee for the Environment, to define future environmental priorities at the national level within the framework of sustainable development. To this end, a national Agenda 21 for Saudi Arabia was established that is in harmony with the Kingdom's policies. A national report has been prepared that chronicles the progress made in implementing this Agenda and makes recommendations on performance improvement in the future.

The achievements of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the field of development over the last three decades show that a large part of Agenda 21 is being implemented as part of its current development plan. On the regional and international levels, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a founder of the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment and of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment Programme. It has ratified the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol for the protection of the ozone layer as well as the Basel Convention on hazardous waste. It has also acceded to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has participated in the activities of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change since its inception through its vice-chairmanship; in addition, Saudi nationals were among those who drafted the Panel's second scientific assessment report.

I should like in this context to express the concern of my Government regarding the selective manner in which Agenda 21 is being implemented. Certain aspects are being emphasized to the detriment of others, and we hope that all sectors will receive equal attention. The programme deals with many issues: water, air and land, as well as human activities that relate to environmental, economic, social and political aspects. Thus, we should work together to accomplish these common objectives, with the intention of helping all parties. Earth, our spaceship, is one planet, and we cannot deal with any of its elements separately.

The issue of combating desertification and drought is a matter of grave concern to the Government of the custodian of the two holy mosques. During the last two decades, our Government has contributed $1.682 billion to combat drought and desertification in African countries. We hope that the international community will contribute the necessary and appropriate financial support to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification so that this problem can be dealt with commensurately with other environmental issues, particularly as more than one billion human beings live in the area in question. Most of the countries affected are poor and lack the necessary scientific research facilities and technological and financial means.

We note that the Convention on Climate Change enjoys wide financial support. We hope that the industrial countries will assume their responsibilities and make available to the developing countries the financing required to deal with the problems of desertification, drought and poverty.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contributes an average of about 5.5 per cent of its gross national product, or $72 billion, as assistance to the developing countries, from which 73 countries have benefited.

The slow implementation of programmes to alleviate the problems of desertification, drought and poverty contrasts with the active efforts to solve the problems that may result from climate change, which receive considerable support from the industrialized countries. We share with the international community its climatic concerns and seek to alleviate their effects. For in addition to the assistance I mentioned, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is currently working to enlarge the green parts of its coastal areas by using hylophytes utilizing sea water.

In this regard, I should like to express my appreciation for the efforts of the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE) exemplified by their publications on indicators of sustainability. At the same time, we hope that the development of indicators which deal with what are "dangerous" emissions as stipulated in article I of the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

According to the basic principles in the third article of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the following should be taken in to consideration.

The countries parties to the Convention should adhere to the Berlin Mandate during the upcoming negotiations on a legal formula to strengthen the commitments of the industrialized countries of annex I of the Convention. This means that no new obligations should be imposed on the developing countries, and that no proposal should be made outside the framework of the Berlin Mandate, for example proposals on joint implementation, systems related to emissions trade permits or any other ideas that have been put forward but that add further obligations with respect to reducing the emissions of gases over developing countries. This is especially important since most of the countries of annex I have not met their commitments, whether to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000 or to meet their financial and technological obligations under the Convention.

We also feel that the States parties to the Convention should take into consideration the fact that developing countries depend on the production and export of fossil fuels. This would require that considerations be embedded in any proposed legal instrument emphasizing that the industrialized countries of annex I must closely adhere to their commitments as prescribed in the Berlin Mandate or in any other legal instrument, in particular policies and procedures related to energy. Here I would mention the following elements.

First, it is difficult to accept the imposition of further taxes on petroleum, which is already burdened by high taxes in the industrialized countries while coal and nuclear energy enjoy high levels of subsidies and tax incentives. These countries must eliminate such subsidies and must bring their taxes on those fuel resources into conformity with the level of pollution that they emit and must ensure that these are equal to the taxes imposed on petroleum products. I would like to note that the proposed taxes on petroleum are estimated to be about 15

times the assistance which industrialized countries contribute to the developing countries.

Secondly, it is difficult to accept the logic behind the industrialized countries' continued production of such fuels, especially petroleum, in all regions outside the developing countries, while at the same time taking all necessary steps to reduce the consumption of such fossil fuels internationally. The final result of this contradiction is a reduction in imports from the developing countries, not to mention the adverse effects on those countries, when it is known that they are dependent on such exports — and the majority are 90 per cent dependent on them for their income.

Finally, we must approve the principle of compensating developing countries whose economies are proven to have suffered from the steps taken by industrialized countries of annex I of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

This special session provides an opportunity for us to reaffirm our commitment to continued serious work on comprehensive consensus solutions to the environmental problems before us. That commitment will be a measure of our political will to face these issues effectively. We need solutions that can be attained only with deep and enlightened research and that are based on scientific fact, solutions that aim to be balanced and that take into consideration the international economic system and the interests of the economies of the developing countries in particular.

The Acting President: I thank the Director-General of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia for his statement.

His Highness Mr. Torki Bin Mohamed Bin Saud Al-Kabir, Director-General of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency the Honourable Mrs. Nino Chkhobadze, Minister of the Environment of Georgia.

The Honourable Mrs. Nino Chkhobadze, Minister of the Environment of Georgia, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mrs. Chkhobadze (Georgia) (*interpretation from Russian*): The five years since Rio have demonstrated the wisdom of those who participated in preparing Agenda 21, which sets out a universal strategy for sustainable development and the basic principles for solving the most important problems facing the entire world community, as well as individual regions and countries. It may be one of the best documents of the latter years of the second millennium. The differing levels of success achieved by individual countries in solving the problems of sustainable development are obvious. One of the factors in such success is a nation's level of development, although this is not the decisive factor. A stable and purposeful State policy combined with international support can accelerate a country's development.

But the real situation in the world — when hundreds of hectares of forest are destroyed every year, when entire species of flora and fauna vanish from the face of the Earth each day, when the degradation of the environment is continuing, and when fewer and fewer natural ecosystems remain — compels us to reflect on whether humankind can move from discussion to action.

Georgia realizes full well that any global problem — world climate change, the disappearance of the ozone layer, the reduction of biological diversity — will be insoluble unless the solutions are found on the local, national and regional levels.

Owing to the economic crisis, Georgia is currently undergoing an artificial sustainable development. Our society associates the increase in the use of natural resources with emergence from the crisis and with the attainment of future prosperity: in other words, with unsustainable development. This is a characteristic of countries with economies in transition, and for this reason it is crucial to find a country-specific approach to implementing a country's economic policy, taking into account the need to conserve natural resources.

Georgia is not unique in its ecological problems. Besides the global ones, the basic problems high on our agenda are: forest conservation, clean water and hazardous toxic waste. To solve these problems, Georgia is creating action programmes on the national level. Our law on the protection of the environment creates a system of planning for environmental protection based on our long-term action plan, the Strategy for Sustainable Development. After approval by Parliament, the Strategy will be one of the fundamental documents determining the future development of Georgia.

The priority of developing the country based on the principles of Rio was reaffirmed in President Eduard Shevardnadze's recent statement supporting the World Wide Fund for Nature initiative known as Gift to the Earth. That statement underlined Georgia's readiness to place 20 per cent of its territory under various categories of protection and to create a legislative framework for protection of the environment and sustainable development.

To implement the principles of sustainable development, Georgia has incorporated into its national legislation the universal norms of environmental protection and its international obligations. Moreover, mindful of the need for a large-scale joint effort, Georgia has acceded to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, and several other conventions. We have begun work to create national programmes in these directions.

Georgia has participated actively in formulating a regional strategy and action plan for the protection of the Black Sea. The problem of pollution in the Black Sea is particularly important to Georgia. Currently, Georgia is formulating a national action plan and a system for the integrated management of coastal zones. The successful completion of these programmes will depend on the solution of our country's political, economic and social problems.

Georgia is one of the States of the Caucasus. The natural environment of the Caucasus, like that of any other part of the world, is unique and unreproduciable. This environment played a decisive role in forming the traditions and national characteristics of the peoples inhabiting that part of the world. Today, however, the region is troubled not only by economic fragility but also by ethnic, social and political conflicts. One of the principles of sustainable development is the prevention of such conflicts. Surely, the time has come for problems of environmental protection and the principles of sustainable development to be discussed at the negotiating table, for all of us are facing these issues. The Earth is one, and our economic problems are the same. This may be the thread that will lead us out of the labyrinth of complex economic, ethnic, political and social disagreements.

Our country has weathered a severe political and economic crisis in the recent past. Even today, many problems remain unresolved. In a country of 5 million people, there are 300,000 refugees and internally displaced persons, industry is operating at one-fourth of its capacity, unemployment is high and a significant portion of the population is living below the poverty level.

As the saying goes, "the wise learn from the mistakes of others, whereas the fool learns from his own". It is time for our planet to get wise and for the developing countries and the countries with transitional economies to stop repeating the mistakes made by many other countries in the past. To do so, we have simply to proceed from words to action.

Like the other former Soviet Republics, Georgia possesses energy-intensive and obsolete equipment and is in great need of new, sophisticated technologies to secure its emergence from the current economic crisis. This includes solutions to its social problems, the rational use of its natural resources and the opportunity to save for the planet what is left of its biodiversity. It is possible to do this and it is definitely worth trying. Only thus can global problems be solved. Our task is to protect the environment from humanity and for humanity.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of the Environment of Georgia for her statement.

The Honourable Nino Chkhobadze, Minister of the Environment of Georgia, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Luc Ayang, President of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon.

Mr. Luc Ayang, President of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Ayang (Cameroon) (*interpretation from French*): Five years ago in Rio, we recognized that peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indissociable. We also recognized that the problems of the environment, such as global warming, the destruction of coastal and marine ecosystems, the degradation of forests, desertification and the overuse of mineral resources are concerns not of any one nation or continent, but of the entire international community.

Aware and convinced that the survival of humanity is a collective responsibility, we decided in Rio to establish a new kind of partnership built of common yet differentiated responsibility in order to promote national, regional and world cooperation for development that we wished to be sustainable.

Accordingly, the developing countries committed themselves to doing everything to preserve and protect the environment, while the developed countries, beyond their ecological obligations, were to provide new and additional financial resources in order to create an international economic environment conducive to the struggle against poverty.

These were the principal objectives that we set for ourselves in Rio and which each country, according to its means, has been striving to pursue. Thus, Cameroon, for its part, has worked to develop internal legal provisions and appropriate structures, including, in particular, a law on the forest and animal regime; the institutionalization and organization of educational seminars on environmental problems; the creation of a national advisory commission for environment and sustainable development; and the development of a national plan of action for environmental management.

Regarding the national plan, I must stress that it was developed through a participatory approach involving international donors, public administrations, academic and scientific research institutions, the private sector, local communities, non-governmental organizations and professional organizations.

Other African countries have shown keen interest in our efforts. Together, we have been able to organize various meetings and to develop projects on marine and coastal ecosystems, fishing resources, the management of our forest and animal heritage, the management of waters and watersheds, and the protection of migratory species.

In this effort, we enjoyed widespread financial support from a number of international organs, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, as well as from several friendly countries. I wish here, on behalf of my country, to express to them our sincere gratitude.

Again within the framework of the implementation of its Rio commitments, Cameroon has made efforts to translate into reality the terms of the various conventions adopted. With regard to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Cameroon has stressed the conservation and management of forest and animal resources through the rehabilitation and creation of numerous protected areas throughout the national territory. Thus, 30 per cent of our national territory has been declared protected areas.

As to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, many actions have been undertaken, including a study on the global research initiative on world environment to monitor the forest cover in southern Cameroon and to forecast changes likely to affect climate and biological diversity; a pre-feasibility study, in cooperation with UNDP, on projects that could contribute to reducing atmospheric warming; and an inventory of greenhouse gases to determine their quantity and, ultimately, to take steps to reduce them.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa is strengthening the ongoing efforts of the Government of Cameroon, especially in the framework of Operation Green Sahel, to combat this scourge, which affects almost one quarter of our national territory.

Similarly, a national plan of action to combat desertification has been established with the assistance of the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office to Combat Desertification and Drought to ensure the rational management of fragile ecosystems in semi-arid areas of the country.

As will be noted, Cameroon's actions to implement Agenda 21 are substantial, but it is clear that pursuing and stepping them up will require the active support of the international community. We must admit that the latter has responded but half-heartedly to the expectations aroused by the Rio Summit, five years after which, despite the commitments undertaken by many, our hopes remain far from fulfilled.

Indeed, the financial resources needed to implement Agenda 21 are cruelly lacking. The international economic environment, despite globalization, is characterized by a growing marginalization of the countries of the South, in particular those of Africa, whose economies are deteriorating and standards of living declining, thus increasing poverty.

During this session, we need not only to reaffirm the ideal of solidarity underpinning Agenda 21, but also and above all to translate it into concrete actions. For, quite clearly, no country or continent of the world can escape the fate of mankind as a whole.

The least endowed countries have committed themselves to making their contributions to the global effort to promote sustainable development in order to leave future generations a more secure and harmonious world. However, let us not forget that the countries of the South still face multiple challenges such as underdevelopment aggravated by the persistence of the economic crises, as well as other major obstacles such as the growing burden of debt and the ravages of endemic disease and hunger.

There is no doubt that the implementation of the commitments of Agenda 21 assumes the increased complementarity of efforts on the part of all countries. However, we believe that these efforts will bear fruit only if they are part of a global solidarity that takes into account our specific realities and the many developmental challenges that the countries of the South face today.

The Acting President: I thank the President of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon for his statement.

Mr. Luc Ayang, President of the Economic and Social Council of Cameroon, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Modibo Traore, Minister of Rural Development and the Environment of Mali.

Mr. Modibo Traore, Minister of Rural Development and the Environment of Mali, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Traore (Mali) (*interpretation from French*): It is exactly five years since the international community sounded the alarm at the Earth Summit. The disturbing situation of the world's environment could plunge all mankind into unprecedented poverty during the next millennium unless all of us together move from expressions of good intention to specific action. The Government of the Republic of Mali welcomes this session, which should make it possible not only to take account of the activities undertaken since the Rio Summit, but above all to pave the way for a new partnership which alone can reverse the current suicidal tendencies of the inhabitants of our planet.

The scenario described at Rio is unfortunately still relevant. Poverty has been recognized as one of the main causes of environmental degradation. It continues to knock at our doors and to assail our eyes. In a desperate effort to survive, millions of men, women and children are obliged to draw on the last reserves of a nature depleted through over-exploitation. At this time, others on this same planet are bent on destroying through the volume of the waste they produce the last ramparts of our common house.

The concept of sustainable development approved by the international community as a whole combines economic, social and environmental dimensions. Of course, it also involves meeting our current and reasonable needs, but without compromising those of future generations. Likewise, the objectives of food security and meeting people's basic needs in terms of education, health care and access to potable water are at the centre of our development programmes.

It would be tedious to enumerate here my country's balance sheet of accomplishments made after the Rio Summit. While observers agree that the people of Mali on the whole live better today than they did five years ago, poverty is unfortunately still the daily lot of most of our fellow citizens. I wish to note the particular difficulties of our compatriots who live in rural areas, where resources today are very degraded because of overgrazing, deforestation, soil erosion, unsustainable agricultural methods and so on.

Environmental questions are cross-cutting in nature. We should therefore tackle them in a global manner. This requires that our actions be coherent and coordinated. In this connection, a higher environmental council was set up in 1995, with a technical secretariat responsible for coordinating governmental action in the field of the environment. In keeping with the recommendations of Agenda 21, the drafting of a national environmental plan was initiated. This plan is responsible for all programmes related to desertification, surface and ground water pollution, atmospheric pollution, poor sanitation suffered by rural and urban peoples, poor management of industrial and household waste and population growth and its impact on urban sprawl.

It gives me pleasure to announce today from this rostrum that the meeting to endorse this plan will be held very shortly. Our country will have a national plan for environmental action soon, in any case by October 1997,

when the first Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Desertification will be held in Rome.

Combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought are of particular importance for our country, which well before the Rio Summit adopted a national plan to combat desertification. Like other Sahelian countries that are members of Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), Mali has for a long time endorsed sectoral priorities such as fresh water, energy and the sustainable management of forests. These help to bring about population stability, health and food security. However, because of lack of resources and the failure to mobilize the necessary resources to implement these initiatives, the large majority of them have suffered the same fate as that which today threatens Agenda 21.

We believe that the implementation of projects to combat desertification throughout the world means that the Convention should be given a specific financial mechanism for the speedy mobilization of resources. The international community must realize that this is not merely a formality on which one can economize. It is a *sine qua non* condition for the success of any endeavour undertaken in the framework of this Convention.

The sustainable management of natural resources, the combatting of pollution and environmental degradation, the development of human resources through the implementation of a population policy, education and health, regional integration, the creation of productive jobs in rural areas and through the development of the private sector in order to eradicate poverty — all these represent the strategic framework which will make it possible to ensure human sustainable development in our country.

We give our unreserved support to the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Since the beginning of the nineteenth special session, the highest authorities of the developed countries have spoken before the Assembly to reaffirm their determination to participate with the developing countries to combat poverty. We take note of these declarations and we welcome the new initiatives that were announced from this very rostrum.

Mali nevertheless hopes that the legitimate search for new approaches that are better adapted will not call into question the search for and mobilization of resources for the implementation of the initial Rio project, whose effects in mitigating poverty are unquestioned. Naturally, in order to attain these goals time is needed, perhaps a lot of time. We also need resources — a lot of resources. However, we need a real partnership based on a culture based on sustainability in order to create the necessary synergy of the efforts made by various sides. We must commit ourselves right now to spread the word of this new culture, one of sharing and solidarity among all peoples irrespective of borders and generations. We must succeed in this battle, first for ourselves and then for future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Rural Development and the Environment of Mali for his statement.

Mr. Modibo Traore, Minister of Rural Development and the Environment of Mali, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, Minister of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment of Bahrain.

Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, Minister of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment of Bahrain, was escorted to the rostrum.

Sheikh Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I am pleased, at the outset, to extend to the President our sincerest congratulations on his election to the presidency of the Assembly at this important session. We are confident that his expertise and abilities will help us realize the objectives for which this session is being held.

We are meeting today in this high-level international forum in order to follow up the achievements and progress made by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, under the banner of sustainable development. This second meeting, to review what has been achieved in the field of the environment and development, reflects the international political will that confirms and enhances the role of the United Nations as a forum for expressing the aspirations and hopes of the international community based on the concept of collective responsibility.

The aim of the Rio Conference was to entrench the concept of the preservation of natural resources and the protection of the environment in accordance with the concept of sustainable development. The State of Bahrain has acceded to a number of international conventions: the

Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and other regional and international conventions. This confirms Bahrain's keenness to support international and regional efforts to enhance the concept of sustainable development. We have also taken an active part in national, regional and international programmes that aim to preserve the environment and participated effectively in a number of international conferences related to the environment, such as, in a spirit similar to that of the Earth Summit of 1992, the Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados in 1994. In addition, we adopted the Washington Declaration concerning the proper management of the coastal environment and sponsored the 1994 environment conference for the parties to the peace process in the Middle East.

At the national level, the State of Bahrain has restructured the executive body that deals with the environment. It has become an important executive mechanism in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment. We adopted an act on the environment in accordance with the Rio principles and the concept of sustainable development. This gave great importance to the environment and attracted the attention of the political leadership of the country. National committees were formed, bringing together governmental and non-governmental institutions to prepare for the implementation of Agenda 21.

We look forward to support from all the international organizations in helping us carry out an overall appraisal of the achievements made and prepare for a comprehensive national strategy to protect the environment in Bahrain. We have already set our priorities and laid down our national programmes, while taking into consideration their relevance to the implementation of Agenda 21 and focusing on chapters 4, 9 and 17 to 29 of Agenda 21. We have studied all the issues and focused on the private sector for planning and implementation.

Small island developing States, including Bahrain, are characterized by limited natural and human resources. However, we have a variety of environmental resources, such as coral reefs, seaweed and growths of mangrove. All this contributes to international environmental balance. In addition, Bahrain is a haven and a home for a number of endangered species, such as marine turtles, sirenians and some migratory birds.

In view of this, we were keen to establish nature reserves and adopt executive resolutions to protect marine and land creatures, as we did when we saved the endangered sirenian species.

We believe that United Nations agencies can explore further opportunities for studying islands and can use them as a model for programmes of sustainable development for other developing countries. We therefore call for a resolution on activating and implementing Agenda 21 and the Programme of Action that was agreed upon at the Global Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. We have to provide better opportunities for the practical implementation these programmes for these countries through various United Nations bodies, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and financial funds established in connection with international conventions.

We also need generous financial assistance, technical assistance and training for all small island developing States.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the President for the outstanding way in which he has guided the work of this session and for all the preparatory work that was done. We are looking forward to a final declaration on protecting the environment and enhancing sustainable development in order to protect our planet and provide for a decent life for future generations.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment of Bahrain for his statement.

Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al-Khalifa, Minister of Housing, Municipalities and the Environment of Bahrain, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Abulhasan, Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait.

Mr. Mohammad Abulhasan, Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): High-level international participation at this

special session of the General Assembly is an indication of the significance attached by the entire world community to the question of environmental conservation and development. Our overriding and ultimate concern is to ensure a clean and safe planet that is hospitable and friendly to human life, now and in the future.

A thorough understanding of the entire spectrum of complex and interwoven issues is crucial. Effective and integrated international cooperation, as well as coordination and persistence, are essential for our common endeavours.

Kuwait accorded special attention to the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which was attended by His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait. Since then His Highness has personally followed the implementation of Agenda 21, which this special session of the General Assembly is convened to appraise. Five years have elapsed since the adoption of the Rio Declaration, and the State of Kuwait has now concluded an integrated national environmental strategy based on the principles and guidelines outlined in Agenda 21. A whole set of policies, measures and targets has now been developed to cover various areas, including the economy, natural resources, industry and energy.

Furthermore, the requirements and implications of the Rio programme of action are constantly being scrutinized and appraised in Kuwait.

As members of this Assembly are aware, Kuwait suffered what was probably one of the worst man-made environmental catastrophes of modern times when over 700 oil wells were set ablaze and millions of barrels of crude oil were spilled into the Gulf waters.

That disaster has had an enormous adverse impact on the implementation of the national programme and plan of action developed by the State of Kuwait for the protection of our environment. Following the liberation of Kuwait from the brutal Iraqi invasion, our chief national concern became the salvage of our environment and its total rehabilitation.

My country has been pursuing the implementation of programmes contained in the Rio Declaration through special national commissions set up to implement the agreements emanating from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. To that end, two panels were established: the National Commission on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the National Commission on the Convention on Biological Diversity. In this context, the completion of the Kuwait National Strategy on Biological Diversity has been a landmark achievement towards the conservation and promotion of the ecosystems within our territories. Furthermore, a number of wildlife sanctuaries have been created.

In the public domain, through the National Assembly, Kuwait's legislative authority, the Environment Committee was established. This Committee approved a bill creating the Environment Board in 1995. The Board developed general policy guidelines for the conservation of the environment, in line with the principles of Agenda 21. The guidelines set major specific goals and measures aimed at the protection of the environment from pollution, the conservation of natural ecosystems, the monitoring of urbanization and housing, and scrutiny of the impact of the use of technology on human life and habitat. All this is carried out with our eyes and minds set on the maintenance of our national heritage.

Among our noteworthy achievements in the area of energy and petroleum was the initiation of a project to process lead-free gasoline and fuel for the domestic market. These products will be increasingly available to local consumers in October 1997. Further, several measures have been successfully introduced to reduce the negative impact of emissions from the burning of gases with high sulphur content.

In order to achieve sustainable development in the areas of agriculture, fisheries and livestock, and at the initiative of His Highness the Emir of Kuwait, preparations are under way to implement the national plan of action for modernization. Direct and indirect subsidies are also being provided to increase the yield of livestock, agricultural production and fisheries.

In the area of environmental protection, the Environmental Protection Act was updated in order to be more responsive to the requirements of sustainable development. The Act provides for the preparation of national plans and strategies for the prevention of air, water, soil, marine and land-based resources pollution. It also calls for laying down the principles and guidelines for assessing the environmental impact of different kinds of projects. Good progress has been made in the environmental monitoring of air, water and soil pollutants.

At the educational level, the State of Kuwait has made great strides in incorporating environmental concepts into school curricula at virtually all levels of education. Specific environmental disciplines, such as desert science, marine and oceanographic studies as well as health and ecology programmes, have been introduced into the education system.

In the five years that have elapsed since the adoption of Agenda 21, Kuwait has joined the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as an active member. It has also signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. In this context, I wish to add that the State of Kuwait has developed a national strategy on biological diversity and efforts are under way to prepare a strategy to combat desertification.

Both the motive and the purpose of this special session are to pool our energies in a joint effort on behalf of humankind. The fact that we are meeting here under the auspices of the United Nations, the embodiment of the world's conscience, is yet another testimony to the universality of our exercise.

The Acting President: I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait for his statement.

Mr. Mohammad Abulhasan, Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Samhan, Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Mohammad Samhan, Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The convening of this special session of the General Assembly to assess progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 is an important step and a historic opportunity for the international community to analyse critically what has impeded the implementation of recommendations and decisions of the Rio Summit. At the same time, it provides an occasion to elaborate objective and constructive proposals on the environment and sustainable development.

Mr. Dorda (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The growing phenomena of poverty, desertification, drought, social backwardness, unemployment and debt in many developing countries represent the most serious obstacles in the way of implementing the recommendations and achieving the goals of Agenda 21. Indeed, all these obstacles undermine efforts towards development. Therefore, Member States, the developed nations in particular, international development organizations and the private sector must fulfil the commitments they undertook in Rio, especially in terms of the transfer of environmentally sound technology and the provision of financial and technical resources, with a view to creating an equitable, fair and just international economic and social environment that would ensure the incorporation of the efforts of the developing countries into the implementation of the overall strategies of sustainable development and environmental protection.

Ever since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the United Arab Emirates, in accordance with the orientation policies of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, aimed at developing human resources while paying close attention to sustainable development and the environment, has been keen to focus its energies on the protection of the environment and the prevention of its pollution.

In 1992 the United Arab Emirates established a high-level environmental commission. In 1993 it set up a national environmental board whose objective is to elaborate environment-related projects and measures designed to put an end to environmental degradation. The goal of these agencies is lay down principles for linking environmental concerns to overall planning.

Given the link between natural resources and industrial, agricultural and human-resources development, my country has been keen to conserve these resources in a sustainable manner and has been preparing a draft national strategy and a plan of action for the environment, to be concluded in the next two years.

In this context, our Government has implemented programmes for combating desertification, expanding "green areas" and developing biological diversity systems, and we have established research centres to develop genetic strains of flora and fauna adapted to our harsh environmental conditions. We have also made pioneering advances in the area of the conservation of our coastal areas, the development of the industrial sector, the promotion of the marine environment and the conservation of our fish stocks. We have enacted many

laws and regulations that will ensure the conservation of these vital areas despite the damaging effects on the marine environment of heavy marine traffic in our territorial waters.

The United Arab Emirates has pursued a policy of coordination and cooperation at the bilateral, regional and international levels in the area of environment and development, including the exchange of information and expertise and the holding of conferences, seminars and competitions on research programmes. We recently announced the holding of an international contest to design a practical model for human settlements, and we have declared 24 November of each year to be Environment Day. Convinced of our shared international responsibility, we signed the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992 and acceded to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December 1995. In addition, we are considering acceding to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification once all legislative procedures have been dealt with.

Political events worldwide have shown that war, national and regional conflicts, occupation, the imposition of *fait accompli* policies and the denial of the legitimate rights of peoples under occupation have an adverse impact not only on peace and security in a region but on economic, social and environmental development. The Arabian Gulf, whose proven oil reserves make it one of the most strategic regions in the world in terms of economy, trade and finance, continues to this day to suffer serious environmental damage as a result of the residues emanating from the vessels that travel through Gulf waters and of the wars and conflicts of the past two decades.

All of these wars and conflicts have had a serious impact on the population and on natural resources, especially on our region's fish stocks and flora and fauna. We believe that the responsibility for conservation of the environment in that region is a common responsibility that should be shared at the national, regional and international levels.

In the same vein, we would like to reiterate that it is very important to resolve disputes by peaceful means and negotiation, in keeping with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

In the Middle East, the Palestinian people and the Arab population in the Syrian Golan, southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley continue to face serious environmental dangers as a result of the continued Israeli occupation of their territories and the growing military threat posed by nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons. Environmental conservation in our region requires as a foundation lasting peace, which cannot be achieved as long as the Israeli Government does not fulfil its bilateral and international obligations under international law and the Rio principles, in particular chapters 23, 14 and 8 of Agenda 21.

In closing, let me add that in order for the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development fully to be implemented, unswerving political will is required. Only then can we improve human behaviour worldwide and thereby fulfil our aspirations in the area of environment and sustainable development.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates for his statement.

Mr. Mohammad Samhan, Chairman of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Muhamed Sacirbey, Chairman of the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Muhamed Sacirbey, Chairman of the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Sacirbey (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Let me do one thing that I think most of us have been hoping to do for some time. Wearing this little tag, I feel as if I am in quarantine; so if no one minds, I will take it off while I make my presentation.

The people of all the nations represented in the Assembly — big or small, north or south, east or west — are inextricably tied together by the environment that we all share. Political borders, ideologies and economic systems cannot serve as effective environmental lines of demarcation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a small country, handicapped by the consequences of war. Our contribution to this effort is further constrained by our circumstances, and we will not compensate by attempting to deliver a lengthy, all-encompassing lecture. Leaders, officials and experts from around the globe have already

more than adequately spoken of the objectives that we all share and of the necessary steps that should and must be pursued. However, our current circumstances and unfortunate recent history allow us to contribute to the current dialogue from a rather unique perspective.

The initial environmental consequences of widespread war, especially the targeting of the civilian population and its means of livelihood in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ironically produced contradictory indications in terms of environmental issues. On the one hand, environmental treasures, as well as civilians, cultural monuments, and industry were targeted and severely damaged. Landmines, spent and live ammunition, and improvised trenches and dirt roads litter our country. Forests and other natural resources were crudely exploited by those who showed no appreciation for nature or for human life. In addition, environmental protection mechanisms were destroyed or disregarded.

On the other hand, because civilians were so comprehensively targeted, including everything from industry to heating, electricity, gas and sanitation facilities, the level of waste from human and industrial activity dramatically decreased. While people suffered without heat through the cold, air quality was actually enhanced. Factories were damaged and remain inactive, but rivers and lakes saw a rejuvenation in aquatic life. Fish reappeared in areas from which they had been absent for years.

Unfortunately, the early indications for the future environmental well-being of the country and the region are much more challenging. Real and lasting peace demands that landmines and war residue be removed, but also that citizens be provided with the opportunity to rebuild their economic lives and, of course, their industries. The pressure for jobs and production is high, especially for a country that has already once passed the phase of a developing nation and where economic philosophy must overcome hateful nationalist ideology and undemocratic tendencies. We will seek to do our part. We have significant human resources, expertise and experience to contribute. Nonetheless, our dependence on multilateral and bilateral assistance is determinative for our future.

Our friends, those with a direct interest in peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, can take advantage of the opportunity for a new beginning, of a rejuvenated environment, and of a well-educated and technically sophisticated population to benefit all the people, the peace and nature. Or, to the contrary, those foreign factors with the capability to influence can seek to leave us once again susceptible to environmentally damaging exploitation.

There does not have to be a diametric choice between environment and economics, between people and nature. Unfortunately, there are already disturbing indications. Perceiving our desperation and urgency, some have been inclined to export to us old and even obsolete technology and exploitative economic activity.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will have to choose its options wisely, and we will direct our meagre resources and our efforts accordingly. We give tremendous priority to the well-being of our environment. At the same time, we believe that we have multilateral and bilateral friends who value the economic and natural potential of our country and the strategic benefits of peace. Our people have suffered tremendously from the war, but now Bosnians and their environment, and all of us, can at least recoup some of the potential benefits incidentally arising out of war-imposed deprivation.

We in Bosnia and Herzegovina are well aware of our global environmental obligations and shudder at the thought that one small country like Bosnia, in its efforts to rebuild and to restart industry, may be put at odds with its own environment and contribute negatively to the plight of others, in particular small countries such as the island States. Having faced extinction, we can well comprehend the threat to existence faced by these small States.

The lessons of Bosnia and Herzegovina are valid for all, as well as specifically for other States recovering from war and those hungry for peace. Properly addressed, the newly attained peace can be translated into new economic and environmental opportunities and international cooperation towards the goals of clean air, clean water and reforestation. To the contrary, if shortsighted strategies and options are forced upon us, it can mean an ever-deteriorating situation combining the consequences of war, pollution and unconscionable industrial exploitation: the conspiracy of landmines and industrial waste overwhelming the land, the people, the fragile peace and our common Earth. The former option benefits all of us. The latter option would ultimately negatively affect all of us.

The beginning is also our conclusion. We are inevitably intertwined through our one common home.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I thank the Chairman of the Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for his statement.

Mr. Muhamed Sacirbey, Chairman of the Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Samir Moubarak, Chairman of the Delegation of Lebanon.

Mr. Samir Moubarak, Chairman of the Delegation of Lebanon, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from French*): I wish at the outset to express our profound grief at the death of Mr. Jacques-Yves Cousteau who, throughout his scientific career, worked to protect the ocean environment. The international community has lost a great champion of the environment. My delegation conveys to the delegation of France its deepest sympathy.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

While the international community was launching Agenda 21 at Rio and laying the groundwork for the debate on sustainable development, Lebanon was rising from the ashes of a destructive war that had lasted 20 years, had claimed the lives of more than 150,000 of its citizens and had left tens of thousands of others injured, maimed or permanently disabled. That war also destroyed Lebanon's infrastructure, damaged hundreds of thousands of housing units, displaced a third of our population and forced another third, mostly skilled labourers and technicians, to emigrate.

A further price was serious degradation of our ecological systems and the human environment. Waste piled up, sewage systems failed, most mountainous lands became barren as the platforms that were erected to prevent landslides broke down, and forests, which had covered 30 per cent of the country, dwindled to less than 3 per cent. In addition, the social welfare, health and educational systems fell to their lowest levels ever.

Consequently, after this long conflict, Lebanon had to build for peace. There is no doubt that Lebanon has benefitted from the new vision for the protection of the environment and the ecosystem and for sustainable development. Yet even armed with this, there were further challenges that we had to meet: strengthening peace within the nation and reconstructing and rehabilitating all that had been destroyed or damaged, while at the same time laying the groundwork for putting in place the conditions adopted by the international community for sustainable development. We are encountering many complexities in these conditions, and these require radical organizational and institutional restructuring, vast resources and the relevant modern technologies and specialized technical know-how. In the absence of any special fund to support it, Lebanon has had to rely on its own capabilities and to prove its worthiness and eligibility to attract resources and investment — all this while parts of the South and of the Beqa'a valley remain under Israeli occupation and while the Israeli war machine continues to pose a constant threat, preventing large segments of our population from pursuing their normal economic and agricultural activities.

In the five years since the Rio Convention, the Lebanese Government has been able to restore normalcy throughout the country. It has also put in place an ambitious plan for reconstruction and rehabilitation, entitled "Prospects 2000", and has been able, in record time, to persuade local, regional and international investors to participate in implementing the programmes of that plan.

Thus, having enjoyed the support of the fraternal Arab States and of a number of friendly countries, and in full cooperation with the executing agencies of the United Nations, international financial institutions and donor countries, Lebanon embarked on the process of implementing the commitments of Rio and made the protection and rehabilitation of the environment in its various aspects an integral part of its works programmes.

We also hastened to accede to the international instruments concluded for that purpose, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and to include their provisions in our national legislation. Also, inasmuch as our capabilities and conditions have allowed, we have sought to respond to the requirements of international cooperation and to engage faithfully in the common international effort to protect our common future.

During this period, Lebanon has also participated in the conferences held under United Nations auspices

and — in cooperation between the Government, the private sector and grassroots organizations — has established national committees to translate the programmes of action developed by those conferences into national programmes.

One example of the Government's work to date is the creation of a Ministry for the Environment as the focal point for the implementation of sectoral environmental plans and for the coordination of national efforts aimed at integrating environmental considerations into the overall economic plans. Plans are also under way to establish a national committee for sustainable development. Environmental rehabilitation programmes have also been developed at a cost of approximately $600 million for the purpose of building, repairing or operating plants for refining sewage water, recycling solid and liquid wastes and cleaning up Lebanon's territorial waters and coast. The Ministry has also cooperated with the industrial sector in order to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, in accordance with the provisions of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Montreal Protocol.

The Government has also created the Ministry of Administrative Reform for the purpose of rehabilitating and strengthening the administrative system, in accordance with the requirements of the new phase of development and to ensure the sustainability of the approved development plans. In this context, the Central Laboratory, the National Council for Scientific Research and the units and organs of the various departments for quality control in food and trade have all been rehabilitated.

A plan has been established for the reforestation of Lebanon, under which thousands of forest trees have been planted in various parts of the country. Three nature reserves have been established and three more planned in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme. Also established have been the National Bank for Agricultural Development and the National Fund for Natural Disaster Insurance. Wildlife hunting has also been regulated. Development projects have been implemented in the marginalized and disadvantaged agricultural areas of Lebanon, particularly the Baalbek-Hermel Project for Integrated Rural Development and Alternative Agriculture.

Human-resource development, the eradication of poverty and social development remain high on the Government's list of priorities. In this respect, many internally displaced persons have been returned to their homes; their deserted villages are being rebuilt and infrastructure and economic institutions rehabilitated to enable them to resume their normal lives.

A new educational structure has been adopted, scores of schools throughout Lebanon have been repaired and restored, and environmental awareness and primary health-care programmes introduced in the educational curricula. Health centres in outlying areas have been repaired and restored.

A national committee for women has been created and the necessary legislation to enable women to participate fully in all political, economic and social fields at the national level introduced.

The economic path followed since the end of the war in Lebanon has depended on the promotion of the physical infrastructure as an essential factor to attract investments that, in turn, invigorate the economy, create new job opportunities and lead to greater productivity.

We have had no real problems in adjusting to the institutional and conceptual requirements of the new international economic order. Our open and free economy is inherited and the private sector is completely dynamic. We have had problems, however, in facing the practical elements of the challenges created by the globalization of the economy and the need to secure the necessary competitiveness at the regional and international levels.

In this context, Lebanon agrees with the position of the Group of 77 and China regarding the institutional frameworks and international cooperation required for reaching a just partnership that will allow the sustainable development of all developing countries. This in turn, will be mutually beneficial to all members of the international community, particularly in protecting the global environment. The commitment of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of rich nations to official development assistance to developing States remains essential.

The time limit prevents us from detailing the continuous achievements and challenges facing Lebanon. The Lebanese delegation has provided a detailed study in this respect, undertaken in cooperation with the competent departments and the relevant international organizations, copies of which are available to interested delegations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Lebanon for his statement.

Mr. Samir Moubarak, Chairman of the delegation of Lebanon, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ravan Farhâdi, Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan.

Mr. Ravan Farhâdi, Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan): The Rio Summit promoted global awareness of the problems of environment and development. We hope that the international community, in securing a genuine partnership, will live up to its commitments to introduce immediate measures for the full implementation of Agenda 21.

Today, we all agree that the plan of action adopted five years ago in Rio has lost nothing of its urgency. To begin with, it is quite clear that sustainable development cannot be achieved throughout the world by the turn of century if a good part of the world's population lacks the most basic life necessities, such as safe drinking water. It is also understood that global sustainability will remain mere wishful thinking so long as the rich industrialized countries continue to undermine the ecological life-support system of the human family by wasting resources.

On the other hand, the developing, non-industrialized countries face increasing challenges in working on their environmental-protection issues. These issues, however, in addition to the battle against poverty for the least developed countries — especially those finding themselves in an ever more desperate situation, due in part to the fact that they have been devastated by continuous warfare — must win high priority in the allocation of additional and immediate assistance.

Afghanistan is neither a tropical country nor a land covered by natural green pastures. Green areas in Afghanistan are only those cultivated by farmers and the orchards. In 1979, when Afghanistan was invaded by the Red Army, the country had a very sophisticated environmental study in the works, with the technical assistance of France, called *Tapis Vegetal*, with geographical maps at a 1/50,000 scale. That study, available in the archives of the French Government, is still highly useful for the study of the environmental landscape of the country.

Afghanistan is a country which is ravaged by more than 10 million landmines. The heavy toll constantly taken on farmers and their children — the future generation of farmers — by landmines is depriving the country of those individuals who would revitalize green areas. Anti-personnel landmines in Afghanistan are a colossal factor in the degradation of the environment. The green areas exist only because of farming and orchard planting. The more dangerous it becomes for the farmers and the shepherds to walk on landmine-infested areas, the more the green areas will be transformed into arid land. Agriculture, which is the most important factor of environmental protection in Afghanistan, will never be promoted until the mine-clearance programmes are effectively implemented.

Let me also draw the Assembly's attention to paragraph 21 of Chapter I of the Report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on preparations for the convening of this extraordinary special session. Its subparagraph (e) concerns the disproportionate impact of poverty on women, stating that can be addressed in particular by removing the barriers to women's equal access to productive resources and services. In Afghanistan, in the towns invaded by the Taliban mercenaries, actions contrary to these important precepts have taken place and are taking place, as witnessed by non-governmental organizations. Women, many of whom are destitute widows and have to feed their children, have been cruelly deprived from their right to work.

I invite those studying about Afghanistan to read the report the Human Rights Special Rapporteur, Dr. Choong Hyun Paik, presented to the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva on 20 February 1997, about the mass violation of women's rights committed by the Taliban, including the beating of 225 women and the chain-lashing of many of them. I also refer to the Security Council debate on Afghanistan of 14 April 1997.

Because of the diversity of the climate in Afghanistan, a country which is a rendezvous of three Asian regions — the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia — the problems related to the protection of the environment are also very diverse. The cold winter climate of the mountainous region, the largest part of the country, causes the crucial fuel problem during the cold season. The situation in Afghanistan in this regard is worse than the sub-tropical lands of our Asia. Conditions in Afghanistan in this regard are very different from those in the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent.

The conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests are a crucial factor in economic and

social development all over the world. Afghanistan has small mountain forest areas in the southeast, in Paktia and Kunar. In both places, deforestation is advancing, in the case of Paktia with alarming speed.

While in neighbouring Pakistan some measures have been taken against the deforestation of mountain forests, encouragement is given, on the contrary, to those on both sides of the border to promote the trade of forest wood cut from Afghanistan and transported to Pakistan. No limitation of any kind is recommended to or observed by a group of greedy local chieftains with regard to cutting the mountain forest trees in Afghanistan and transporting them to Pakistani towns where they are used for the construction of houses. Connivance between officialdom and wood smugglers is a well-known fact in the area.

Let us remember that before 1979, Afghanistan was receiving German technical assistance for the conservation of the Paktia region mountain forests. This and all western assistance to Afghanistan was interrupted after the occupation.

Regarding environmental degradation, let me quote a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report:

> "Unavailability or unaffordability of alternative sources of energy in rural areas (such as coal, fuel, oil and kerosene) have left people heavily dependent of fuel-wood for their basic energy needs. Over-exploitation of fuel-wood resources has led to extensive deforestation, severe soil erosion and loss of productive agricultural land."

The war in Afghanistan, as has been well known to the United Nations since the Red Army invaded our country in 1979, caused the destruction of basic rural infrastructure such as the traditional irrigation system. It is unfortunate that because of an armed conflict directly imposed by foreign intervention and the aggression that still ravages the Afghan economy, nothing has been done to implement the UNDP views for the rehabilitation project in this field.

In many parts of the country, the forced displacement of the population as a result of armed conflict and the crowding of civilian refugees in rural areas has created many troublesome hardships, including the lack of safe water. The continuation of war in Afghanistan has worsened the situation in the country. In addition to the killings and forced exodus by the Taliban of entire rural and semi-rural populations in some areas, it has also caused a dramatic disruption of the ecosystem and of current agricultural seasonal work.

The role of the relevant organizations and institutions of the United Nations system, of non-governmental organizations and of donor countries is crucial in protecting the environment in a country like Afghanistan. UNDP, in cooperation with other organizations, should continue to strengthen its contribution to programmes for sustainable development, the protection of the environment and the eradication of poverty.

Let me present a proposal to the United Nations at the end of this brief statement. War-stricken countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are suffering from a set of crucial hardships. In addition to landmines, many other socio-economic difficulties resulting from long armed conflicts are shared by these countries. It is high time to make a special study of all these least developed countries that are also war-stricken and of their problems of rehabilitation, reconstruction and protection of the environment.

In conclusion, let me remind you that for Muslims, who constitute almost one fifth of the world's population, the respect for and protection of the environment, which is a blessed gift of God, is a subject of faith in accordance with Koranic precepts. Other religions also dispense similar teachings. We can say that respect for the environment is a sacred duty of all individuals of the world.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan for his statement.

Mr. Ravan Farhadi, Chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting Chairman (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Sorour (Inter-Parliamentary Union): The decisions taken by Governments in Rio are at the heart of the concerns of the worldwide parliamentary community, and I speak today on behalf of that community. During

the past five years, Members of Parliament throughout the world have come to debate the consequences of those decisions and to consider how they can best be implemented while remaining attuned to the concerns of the populations they represent. They have an important role to play and a hard task to perform. Their role is important, since their active participation is indispensable if the objectives of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) are to become a reality.

Here, I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the overall evaluation of parliamentary action to implement Agenda 21 which was recently adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and which is available to the Assembly in the addendum to document A/S-19/15. Their task is a difficult one since, on account of the worsening of the situation at the world level, the economic crisis and unemployment in the North, poverty and catastrophes of all kinds in the South, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Governments and citizens to keep commitments which impose heavy short-term sacrifices and whose benefits will be felt only in the long term.

It is no secret that ecological choices seem more popular in periods of sustained growth than during a crisis or recession. However, this very worsening of the situation is justification for the implementation of the Rio programme. We all know that an ecological crisis not only leads to the deterioration of the environment, it is itself a factor in economic decline and social destabilization. There are more and more countries where food is scarce and where the depletion of the natural commons is leading to a decline in production, the loss of jobs and a fall in exports. Insecurity and poverty are becoming generalized, including in the countries described as rich.

How can the imperatives of environmental protection and economic development be reconciled? There is an answer to this dilemma. The tremendous input made by UNCED to thinking on the interdependence of problems of environment and development has in fact led to the identification of technical solutions. The measure of resolute action for sustainable development is therefore essentially of a political nature.

Overcoming these obstacles calls for the mobilization of all actors in society and, first and foremost, their representatives — Members of Parliament. Indeed, it is they who give political legitimacy to government action. It is they who ensure that such action receives popular support, and it is they who have the task of seeing to it that the commitments reached in Rio are respected. Since they bear this capital responsibility, it is, to them, above all, that present and future generations will attribute the successes or failures of sustainable development.

In order for parliamentary action to be effective, Parliaments and their members must themselves be convinced of the need to give preference to the long-term interests of society and to call into question the dominant model of development. It is thus essential that they be associated with the work of the international community and that the concerns inherent in their function be duly taken into consideration.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union therefore welcomes the strengthening of its links with the United Nations, as demonstrated by my presence here today. It expresses a wish that Parliaments and their members throughout the world could thus work alongside other governing bodies to bring their contribution to international debates as they do to national debates.

Allow me to take this opportunity to stress the absolute importance of renewed vigour in the worldwide partnership for sustainable development. Only international solidarity will enable us to build a safer world, a world that is more just and more free, both for today and tomorrow. But let us not deceive ourselves. It is largely the failure to embrace the cause of solidarity that is preventing the success of the programme established by UNCED. Unfortunately — and I repeat, unfortunately — the persistent reluctance of the countries of the North to respect their commitments to the developing countries by granting additional financial resources, increasing public development aid to 0.7 per cent of their gross national product and transferring eco-technologies under favourable conditions, is considerably restricting the capacity of these countries to meet the requirements of sustainable development. Solidarity must also lead to a solution of problems such as the debts of developing countries, particularly for the poorest of them.

Of course, financial input alone will not suffice. It must go hand in hand with a worldwide policy designed to establish the concept of sustainable development firmly in the minds and behaviour patterns of citizens. In this spirit, it is necessary to redefine the established priorities in the management and planning of limited resources.

In conclusion, I would like, on behalf of all the world's Members of Parliament, to urge Governments and multilateral cooperation institutions to give a solemn

undertaking to honour all the Rio commitments, to show greater determination in their respect for them, to reinforce the actions so far undertaken and, to that end, to set precise goals with specific time-frames.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union for his statement.

Mr. Ahmed Fathy Sorour, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. Wally N'Dow, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Mr. Wally N'Dow, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. N'Dow (Centre for Human Settlements): It is an honour and a privilege to be able to participate in this review of the implementation of the outcome of that most historic of United Nations conferences, the Earth Summit.

The promise of the Earth Summit to bring about a sustainable human future will be fully realized only when the challenge of providing improved shelter, housing and management of human settlements, particularly in the world's urban centres and mega-cities, is addressed.

This is the important connection between the Earth Summit and the Istanbul Conference, the City Summit, which took place exactly a year ago in Istanbul. The objective of the Istanbul Summit was to raise global awareness for the sake of an urgent improvement in the living conditions of more than 1.5 billion people the world over, people who are today inadequately housed or simply just homeless. The Istanbul Conference further focused global attention on the importance of the need for vigorous action to address the management of these cities, this new habitat of mankind, this explosion that is taking place in nations large and small. We are all rushing headlong into an urban twenty-first century. The century of the city has truly arrived, and in most cases we are unprepared for this new century.

These challenges — shelter and housing and the need to address urbanization — both impact disproportionately and very severely on hundreds of millions of poor and disadvantaged people in nations large and small — people who, mostly but not in all cases, live in the developing countries of our world; people who are huddled in vast urban slums or in rural shacks; people who lack not just secure work, but also such basic necessities as clean water, sanitation, waste disposal, safe transportation and even the most minimal green spaces to call their own.

Today in these Halls, most of us speak of impending disaster, impending ecological doom. We speak of the slow and agonizing death of our planet unless urgent action is taken everywhere. But there is another reality out there. It is that, for the world's poor, these teeming millions who are huddled in their shacks looking for work that does not exist, this agony that we describe, that we foretell here today, has already begun. This is why, when the global action plan of Istanbul, the Habitat Agenda, was drawn up, an agreement was reached with great difficulty and contention — yet successfully — that there must be instituted a right to housing whose progressive and full realization must be the concern of every nation.

Why cities and why the urban centres? It is in the world's cities today that the majority of our planet's population is going to be living. This urbanization of our world is driven by unprecedented growth in developing countries. It is also coinciding with the decay of the countryside in most parts of the world. In just 30 years from now, urban populations will be the highest they have ever been in our human history.

But why are these cities still more important for sustaining our human future? First of all, today, on the positive side, cities are centres of the flowering of the human intellect, of discovery, of the arts, of science, of intellectual ferment. But today also, it is important that we do not forget that it is in the cities that most of the world's food is being consumed; that most of the world's fibre is being used; that most of the world's resources — mineral, water and otherwise — are being used; that the most pollution is being generated; that the most waste is being produced.

But it is also in these cities that most social dislocation is taking place: the disasters, the catastrophes of a social kind — drugs, violence; that the risk of political strife is highest; and, importantly, that national wealth and national economies are focused and the very expression of globalization and a globalized economy are taking place. Indeed, it is in these urban centres of our world that the sustainability battle may be won or may be lost.

It stands to reason, therefore, that when it comes to the protection of our biosphere; when it comes to preserving the global commons; the protection of the fresh-water resources of our planet; the protection of our coastal areas; the consumption and conservation of natural resources; the protection of human health; the generation of wealth; the role of urban centres, cities, this new human habitat, must be addressed and must be at the centre of our international concern.

Although problems may be defined as global, there must be local solutions. This is why the General Assembly, in its resolution 51/181 of 16 December 1996, called for the holding of this special session. As it did so, it emphasized and recommended that this session give due attention to the issue of human settlements in the context of global, sustainable human development.

This focus on sustainable human development and on enabling and facilitating local attention is the approach that we take in HABITAT, we who have been designated as task managers for those chapters of Agenda 21 that deal with human settlements. These tasks are contained in the report of the implementation of Agenda 21 forwarded to this special session by the Commission on Human Settlements.

Over the five years since UNCED, four priorities areas have emerged in the field of human settlements. I recommend them strongly to representatives. They all relate to the implementation of Agenda 21.

First, a philosophy of "shelter for all" must now drive policy-making in nations large and small — a policy that will improve the immediate environment of people, that will alleviate poverty, that will bring about social justice. Poverty manifests itself primarily in inequalities in living conditions, differences between neighbourhoods, social strife and dislocation that will ultimately lead to great difficulties at the national level.

Secondly, improved environmental infrastructure and services must, again, be the driving force in our planning. We must enhance environmental infrastructure, we must provide the services and we must reduce pollution.

Thirdly, it is recommended that we all devote more attention to managing cities better — big cities, medium-sized cities — and increase the local capacity for managing them for sustainable development.

Fourthly, we must instil a gender-sensitive strategy, plans that include the concern of participation of half of our population, the womenfolk, to promote consensus on priorities and to make sure that we, men and women, pool our intellectual and other resources to reach our common objectives together.

But how far have we come? Today, five years after Rio and one year after Istanbul, strategies have been reformulated for shelter in 80 countries, I am glad to report. These strategies have been formulated along enabling principles and we are satisfied with the pace of implementation as it is evolving. There has been remarkable improvement in urban management, which has become a priority for many Governments today. It has also become a priority for international action, including the international lending institutions.

The inclusion of communities, of civil society, in partnership for the improvement of services and infrastructure is critical, because today we have come to a stage of our human journey where it is no longer possible for Governments alone to have the vision and the resources to overcome all the challenges we face for human development.

We are pleased to inform this Assembly that local plans of action for sustainable development have proliferated since Rio. Today, 1,800 local Agenda 21s have been formulated and are being implemented and 130 countries have drawn up national plans of action for human-settlements development as part of the Istanbul process.

We have to ask ourselves two basic questions: By what strategies must we now follow up on this human-settlements dimension of sustainable development? What will be the concepts that will animate our action?

First of all, the acceptance of the principle of enablement in partnership: networking and the exchange of best practices has worked. Secondly, it is important that there be international action, international cooperation, new resources and additional resources to support action at the global level. These are the main commitments through which action has been taken.

In Istanbul in June 1996, the global community reconfirmed to the Habitat Agenda its commitment to Agenda 21. One year later, our Commission on Human Settlements has pushed these frontiers even further, finding a normative role for itself in the implementation

of the Agenda and calling for a revitalized and strengthened United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Finally, it is no exaggeration to state here that our task — yours and ours in the United Nations — of attempting to meet the sustainable development challenge will be complete only when we answer two very fundamental questions: How is mankind going to live in the twenty-first century? And where will mankind be living in the twenty-first century? These questions are crucial because the combination of poor human settlements and poverty will destroy nations. It has already started doing so in many parts of the developing world.

As we have seen from the testimony given from this rostrum, especially by countries ravaged by wars and civil strife, the underlying factors are often related to non-functioning human settlements — a struggle for human settlements, a struggle over whose land, whose water, whose village, whose city.

These are very important issues, because unless they are resolved, we will not be able to fulfil our quest for sustainable development, which has become — it must be realized — the most relevant disarmament philosophy for the international community. Sustainable human development through, among others things, human settlements is the new name for peace and security in the world, and it must be pursued with great vigour and vigilance.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.

Mr. Wally N'Dow, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I give the floor to Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility.

Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. El-Ashry (Global Environment Facility): It is a great honour to take part in this special session of the General Assembly dedicated to reviewing — and renewing — our collective commitment to sustainable development. Many constructive comments and diverse viewpoints have been voiced this week. But there is one thing on which we all agree: our five-year report card as stewards of earth's resources is not a stellar one. Still, I continue to be optimistic. By working together, we can keep the promises made in Rio and clear a path towards sustainable development.

The spirit of Rio remains strong, but it has not remained unchallenged. We have been productive at the margin but not decisive at the core — in Governments, international institutions and legislative assemblies.

Too often we have chosen to conduct business as usual, with results that range from steady increases in greenhouse gases to the widening gap between rich and poor. Just in these five years, we have added 450 million people, increased carbon emissions by 4 per cent and laid waste another 3.5 per cent of the world's tropical forests. Ecosystems which are critical to the functioning of earth's life-support systems continue to be undermined, and land degradation threatens food security and livelihoods, especially in Africa.

Another worrisome statistic underscores the stagnation, even the decline, of financial support from Governments for sustainable development. Official development assistance as a percentage of donor country gross national product is at 0.27 per cent — its lowest point in half a century.

On the positive side, foreign direct investment in developing countries has more than tripled since 1992; in 1996, it reached $285 billion. However, foreign direct investment is no panacea for sustainable development; 73 per cent goes to just 12 countries, and foreign direct investment has not yet been prominent in the environmental and social sectors. Civil society has become an important force in implementing Agenda 21 and in increasing public awareness of global sustainability, particularly at the local level.

There has also been the emergence of the restructured Global Environment Facility (GEF). At Rio, Governments called for the GEF to be restructured. In March 1994, an agreement was reached that responds fully to the provisions of Agenda 21. The restructured GEF ensures universality in membership, flexibility in operations, transparency and democracy in governance, and predictability in funding, as well as accessibility and non-conditionality.

The restructured Facility was also replenished with a $2-billion-dollar trust fund. Clearly, the GEF represents

the first, and most significant, financial commitment arising from the Rio Summit. In the three years since its restructuring, the GEF, through its implementing agencies — the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank — is at work in more than 110 countries and has 161 participating nations. And, on an interim basis, it operates the financial mechanism for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Above all, the GEF is a financing instrument that also leverages and mobilizes private-sector resources and seeks co-financing opportunities with other bilateral and multilateral development institutions. The GEF has now authorized more than $1.6 billion in grants to recipient countries while leveraging more than $4 billion from other sources.

Our record in the short time since Rio is a strong one. But I am also a realist in recognizing that there is a great deal more to do, not only in addressing global environmental issues, but also in increasing the efficiency of our operations, our responsiveness and the dissemination of lessons and experience.

This is a very important year for the GEF. If we are to continue as the principal mechanism for the global environment, and to assist developing countries in fulfilling their commitments under the climate change and biodiversity Conventions and in the transfer of environmentally sound technology, particularly renewable energy, and promote partnerships for global sustainability, a successful replenishment of the GEF is absolutely essential. I am heartened by the strong statements of support made this week.

Today we have the opportunity — indeed the responsibility — not just to take stock and assess lessons, but also to address with renewed urgency the actions required to put our lifestyles, our consumption patterns, our population growth and our human settlements on a sustainable path.

This week, speakers highlighted a number of priorities, including fresh water, oceans, mega-cities, forests and desertification. These are all very important areas for concerted national and international action. But today I should like to single out one major priority, with all its profound and encompassing ramifications — not just on the areas of concern I mentioned earlier but also on the health, livelihood and economic well-being of people everywhere. This is a priority that will in a few months test our political will and resolve to move from rhetoric to action. I am speaking of the issue of climate change, and of the need for effective and binding targets, within a reasonable time-frame, for reducing greenhouse gases and for the pursuit of sustainable energy development.

There is clear consensus that we are modifying our atmosphere in an unprecedented way by the carbon emissions we are pumping out. Yes, there are some scientific uncertainties on the degree and distribution of regional impacts. But the time to act on climate change is not when all uncertainties are removed and the links are proved beyond a doubt; we must act when the possibility cannot be discounted. This is exactly the approach we in the international community have taken in the past to deal with priority environmental concerns such as air pollution, acid rain, toxic chemicals and in the banning of carcinogenic pesticides like DDT.

We also should not be confusing responsibilities. The biggest responsibility falls on those with the largest emissions. Solutions for such major global problems, however, need to be wide-ranging, cost-effective and based on the cooperation of all nations, without jeopardizing the right of the developing world to its own sustainable development. In this regard, incentives for facilitating the large-scale transfer to developing countries of energy-efficient and renewable-energy technologies can go a long way towards achieving both developmental and environmental objectives. The GEF stands ready to assist the international community in this endeavour.

The GEF, in a modest way, is already helping developing countries and economies in transition take the first steps towards addressing this problem. In a short time and with limited funds we are increasing the world-wide output of photovoltaic energy more than five-fold. And, with the World Bank and other partners, we are exploring the features of a large-scale programme on renewable energy. However, we will not collectively have a global impact on climate change unless industrialized and industrializing countries do what they must to reduce their emissions. It is not too late to reach an equitable and effective agreement at Kyoto if we marshal the political will and resolve to take the necessary steps now. We should no longer gamble with the future of our grandchildren and their children.

Agenda 21 opens with this hopeful observation:

"integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to

> the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future. No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can — in a global partnership for sustainable development". (*A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. 1), annex II, para. 1.1*)

The Global Environment Facility has been privileged to help implement its part of this partnership on behalf of the people of the world. And we will continue to do so in the interest of sustainable development and of future generations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility, for his statement.

Mr. Mohamed El-Ashry, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker is Mr. Martin Khor, Director of the Third World Network, speaking on behalf of the Non-Governmental Organizations' Major Group.

Mr. Martin Khor, Director of the Third World Network, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Khor (Third World Network): On behalf of the community of non-governmental organizations, I wish to thank the President and the members of the General Assembly for giving us the opportunity and the honour to address the Assembly and to participate in the working groups of this very important special session.

Five years ago the Earth Summit was a source of hope for a new global partnership. Today, the world's citizens are alarmed that we are rushing even nearer to the brink of ecological disaster. We are also deeply disappointed that the spirit of Rio seems to have somewhat vanished. Aid has fallen. Financial resources continue to be sucked out of developing countries through debt servicing and declining terms of trade. At the end of the 1980s for example, countries of sub-Saharan Africa were losing 15 per cent of their gross national product because of the fall in their terms of trade. Overall, today, $300 billion to $500 billion flows from the South to the North every year, creating a huge financial vacuum that the small volume of aid is unable to offset fully.

Instead of the technology transfer that was promised at Rio, the new intellectual property rights agreement in the World Trade Organization has created new barriers to the South's access to environmentally sound technology. That agreement also accelerates the practice of what we in the community of non-governmental organizations call bio-piracy, in which genetic resources and the knowledge of local communities are hijacked and transformed into patents and patented products that are a new source of enormous profit for the big corporations. The main victims are the poor communities and the ordinary people who endure the destruction of their environment and the indignities of poverty.

And yet today we stand and salute the hundreds and thousands of local community leaders and the millions of ordinary people around the world, who in the last five years have continued to provide us with the hope that something is being done to save the Earth.

We salute the indigenous peoples, who are desperately guarding the remainder of the world's rainforests and other ecosystems.

We salute the local communities and environmental activists, both of the North and of the South, who are fighting to save the remnants of their old-growth forests and who are bravely battling the toxic dumps and hazardous industries located in their neighbourhoods.

We salute the communities in every region of the world that have had to bravely defend their lands, homes and resources from the encroachment of commercial interests and from big billion-dollar projects that sometimes turn out to be economically unviable or ecologically destructive and that have created millions of environmental refugees.

We salute the thousands of farmers around the world who have suffered from the ill effects of chemical-based agriculture, who have switched to organic farming on their own, and who are rebuilding their soil and their land despite the lack of support from the agriculture establishment.

We salute the consumer movements that are fighting against unhealthy products and unsustainable consumption patterns, that campaign for breast-feeding instead of baby foods, that raise the alarm over the hazardous pesticides and pharmaceutical drugs that are dumped onto the third world, and that have taken the tobacco industry to court and forced it, in the United States at least, to admit its

liability, to pay billions of dollars in compensation, and to agree to permit the Government to regulate their behaviour.

We salute the campaigners and the scientists who are exposing the darker side of genetic engineering, and who are waging a campaign against the patenting of life and the cloning of Nature's creation.

We salute the women who are in the forefront of the communities' fight for survival, hugging the trees to prevent their being chopped down, standing in front of the bulldozers, fighting against toxic industries and toxic dumps to prevent the poisoning of their children.

These brave, ordinary people, who are often the poorest and most humble of our societies, are the true practitioners and the real heroes of the sustainable development that the rest of us usually only talk about. They are in the forefront of the battle to defend their rights and to save not only their world but the world of all of us, on our behalf, always with hardship and bravery, and sometimes paying with their very lives. They are the ones who inspire us to believe that there is still hope for sustainable development.

We also salute the many non-governmental organizations in the fields of development and environment, the environmental journalists, the public servants in local authorities, the planners at the national level and the precious few political leaders and diplomats at the international level who in their own way have stuck out their necks on behalf of sustainable development. They include many who are present in this Hall and elsewhere in this building, who are going against the status quo and pioneering the way ahead.

We owe it to the public to do our part to challenge the old and unsustainable ways and patterns of production, technology, consumption and lifestyles.

The millions of battles waged at the local level are all linked to the growing power of globalization. The globalization prevailing today is inequitable, no doubt benefiting a few people but also marginalizing the many. It is based on the same consumption and production patterns that we have already proclaimed to be unsustainable. It represents the growing power of big business, which is increasing its monopoly of the economy.

In the five years after Rio, globalization is undermining the sustainable development agenda. Commerce and the need to be competitive have become the top priorities in many countries and the environment has been downgraded. In particular, the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements of 1994 seem to have overridden the 1992 Rio agreements of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). WTO is now institutionalizing globalization.

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also concerned that the role of the United Nations is being steadily eroded and transferred to the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, which represent a different model of international cooperation. We therefore call on the political leaders to take control of globalization and to channel it towards sustainability.

In the next five years, the following 10 other actions are urgently needed. First, we must make the private sector more accountable. Second, we must make the world trading and financial systems more transparent and accountable to the public and to the goals of sustainable development. Third, we must greatly strengthen the resources and the role of the United Nations in ways that enable it to be true to its mission of serving the people. Fourth, we must create more opportunities for NGOs to participate in the United Nations and in policy-making and consultation at the national level. Fifth, we must integrate social, equity and environmental concerns in economic policy and development planning at the national and international levels. Sixth, we must rigorously assess new technologies for ecological, safety and social impacts. Seventh, we must quickly conclude effective treaties preventing the export of hazardous chemicals and other substances. Eighth, we must place top priority on the need to protect watersheds and hill regions in order to prevent further forest loss and to secure water supplies for the future. Ninth, we must take much more seriously the task of phasing out unsustainable agriculture and vigorously promoting sustainable agriculture. Tenth, we must have a new North-South dialogue and reforms in international economic relations, starting with the meeting of the Eight and the technology commitments of Rio, but moving on also to debt relief, fairer terms of trade and finance for developing countries.

We, the NGOs, realise that these tasks are very hard to achieve and that they can be done only if citizens themselves actively participate and campaign for them. In the next five years, the NGOs can be expected to pressure our policy-makers, politicians and diplomats to meet their commitments to sustainability. But the NGOs, citizen groups and social movements will also intensify the pressure on themselves to fight for people's rights,

for the local and global environment and for the future of this Earth.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the Director of the Third World Network for his statement.

Mr. Martin Khor, Director of the Third World Network, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. David Kerr of the International Chamber of Commerce, speaking on behalf of the Business and Industry Major Group.

Mr. David Kerr of the International Chamber of Commerce was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Kerr (International Chamber of Commerce): I thank the members for allowing me the opportunity of addressing this special session of the Assembly.

The 1992 Summit at Rio presented business with a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge to align its practices with sustainable development; an opportunity to take the lead in finding answers. Five years later, in 1997, we believe there is a good story to tell.

Member companies of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development have taken a lead in defining the issues to be addressed and in working together to develop answers and put them into practice. Much has been achieved. Much more has begun. And much remains ahead of us. After all, sustainable development cannot be achieved by one company, one business sector or one country alone. It must be a cooperative, collective effort involving learning by trial and error.

Governments are correctly withdrawing from areas where others, such as civil society and business, can and do perform required functions better. Business, through free trade, is spreading the technologies, skills and processes required for development and, given the right global frameworks, for more sustainable development.

However, despite these positive happenings, there is a tendency among Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media to call on business to do everything: to create wealth and jobs, clean up the environment, deliver development, satisfy all stakeholders, fight corruption, educate, provide health care and generally stabilize and improve society.

Obviously, business cannot do all of these things. However, business can contribute to the solution. The only requirement is that business be able to earn a profit. One thing is certain: A business that is not profitable over time ceases to exist and cannot contribute on any issues. So in this sense, competitiveness in the marketplace must be a first concern of any business.

It is for precisely this reason that the more far-sighted businesses are taking an interest in sustainable development. Several trends suggest that business is and will be paying increasingly more attention to the sustainable development agenda in order to remain competitive. No one trend taken alone is totally convincing. However, taken cumulatively, these trends make compelling reading for a thoughtful chief executive.

The trends include environmental regulations and enforcement getting tougher — in some countries chief executives face jail sentences for wilful pollution damage. Companies can save costs and boost profits by cutting waste and using natural resources more efficiently. Some Governments are encouraging self-regulation and pacts with Government agencies, rather than creating new environmental laws. Banks are taking a closer look at the environmental records of companies. They are concerned about their own legal liabilities and by borrowers not being able to repay loans if they face large pollution clean-up bills. The best and brightest people are more willing to work for environmentally responsible companies. The public is using its buying power to encourage business to fulfil environmental and social responsibilities. Increasingly, environmental groups and businesses are working together to find solutions. These trends, taken together, make a compelling case for business to pay attention to the sustainable development agenda.

The next step for advancement is answering the question: How can business travel along this positive route more quickly? One important approach is to keep improving the lines of communication among business, government and NGOs. Another is with the help of Governments. Governments are needed to create the conditions that will allow consistent and realistic goals to be developed and met — goals that are based on good science and the sound assessment of risk, and which balance ecological, economic and social objectives.

The conditions needed for business to make a greater contribution to sustainable development include the following: freer and more open markets — trade is

the lifeblood of all economies, and open, prospering markets are a powerful force for creating equal opportunities for people; stable and predictable trade rules that help guarantee the conditions for freer and fairer competition in world markets; international standards of quality and environmental performance in order to avoid creating barriers to trade; realistic target-setting which recognizes the realities under which business operates; international frameworks to establish goals and to put in place the most effective solutions; policies to encourage the fast dissemination of technology to overcome many social and environmental problems; economic instruments that motivate and encourage actions that work towards the goals of sustainable development; and voluntary agreements to overcome inflexible and costly command and control policies.

In the five years since Rio, business has made great progress. However, we are still a very long way from achieving sustainable development, and further progress will require contributions from all sectors of society. Business is counting on Governments to play their part.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the representative of the International Chamber of Commerce for his statement.

Mr. David Kerr of the International Chamber of Commerce was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, on behalf of the Workers and Trade Unions' Major Group.

Mr. Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Jordan (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions): Since the origin of industrial society, working men and women have suffered some of the worst effects of unsustainable production. Since its birth, the trade-union movement has worked to attain sustainable development. Chapter 29 of Agenda 21 reflects our goals in this historic struggle.

Since 1992, through the Commission on Sustainable Development, we have said that trade unions must become a vital part of the global effort to implement Agenda 21. It is a grave indictment of the effectiveness of international cooperation — of us all — that so many of the commitments undertaken at Rio by the world's nations have not yet been realized and that the battle is being lost on so many fronts.

We believe that this illustrates the fallacy of thinking globally without acting locally. Too often the most vital points for real change, the world's workplaces, have been left out of the search for solutions. In over 2 million workplaces throughout the world, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) represents 124 million trade unionists from the national trade union centres of almost every country in the world, and all of them are workers who have a tremendous potential to stimulate change.

We know that trade unions, with Governments and employers, could mobilize workers in these workplaces to enable significant shifts away from unsustainable patterns of production. This, we believe, would have an enormous impact on all workplaces in every country and society. We have already demonstrated that the involvement of workers in workplace decision-making results in savings in terms of money, resources and waste. Yes, and it is we who can break down the barrier of fear caused by concern over job losses due to environmental transition.

Last year at the World Congress of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the largest gathering of trade-union leaders in the history of the world committed themselves to campaign for the involvement of workers and trade unions in sustainable-development decisions affecting the workplace. On behalf of those leaders, I want to communicate a clear message to this special session of the General Assembly: if you are serious about meeting the challenges that face mankind today, involve the trade-union movement.

We know that major change in patterns of production and consumption can be achieved if, and only if, workplaces are placed at the centre of the sustainable-development agenda; if trade unions are recognized for their strategic position and capacity to contribute to the search for solutions; if partnerships between employers, unions and Governments are promoted, including those negotiated as workplace agreements; if the International Labour Organization, through its labour standards and reporting mechanisms, is made central to implementation plans; if national reporting and monitoring systems are linked to workplace activities; if eco-management and workplace audit practices are made compulsory and

include the involvement of workers and trade unions where they exist; and, finally, if where such measures are not possible, as in many developing countries, codes of conduct are utilized to integrate employment and social justice perspectives.

The trade-union movement recognizes climate change as the most potentially disruptive of all environmental concerns. We know that the drastic measures required to deal with it could have an unprecedented impact on workers, not only in the coal, oil, gas, forestry, transportation and fishing industries, but throughout the world of manufacturing and in many service industries as well. However, we also know that without equally dramatic action, the impact on workers and their families of massive climate change could be catastrophic.

We have already seen innumerable workers displaced by climate-based changes. In developing countries, working people are already having to bear the burden of underdevelopment with poverty and poor health. Any global climate policy must ensure the rights of these people to further economic development. In short, any response to climate change must be equitable if it is to enjoy global support. A massive education drive must explain to people why consumption patterns have to change drastically, in domestic life and in the workplace, and how this can be done.

The Workplace Eco-Audit, which we have been promoting since 1993, is getting the message through and bringing the workers and employers together to tackle a host of production problems, including the reduction of carbon-dioxide emissions. It provides a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating progress and feeding into the national reporting processes called for by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

One of our affiliates, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), has provided a concrete working model in its "TCO 6E" for integrating environmental policies as the basis for workplace eco-auditing. Large employers are already working with the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees. Here is the sort of action that a world weary of words wants.

Trade unionists represent the world's largest standing army, mobilized and motivated to spread knowledge, establish values, change attitudes and, above all, to harness commitment all to bring a positive change in the world of work for themselves and a more just and equitable society for their families. Please consider the potential of such army marshalled in the cause of sustainable development.

The world's trade union movement has demonstrated its ability to influence the course of history, from the industrial revolution to the defeat of apartheid. Please — and I repeat again, please — take up our strength and use it in your plans to shape a better world.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I thank the General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions for his statement.

Mr. Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker on the list is Mr. Godwin O. P. Obasi, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization.

Mr. Godwin O. P. Obasi, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, was escorted to the rostrum.

Mr. Obasi (World Meteorological Organization): It is indeed a great honour to address this nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, which has been convened to assess progress in the follow-up to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

The mandate of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) cuts across a significant number of key sectors that are vital to the sustainable development of all nations. As far back as 1976, the World Meteorological Organization issued the first authoritative statement on climate change, indicating the impact of the build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This was followed by the convening of the first and second World Climate Conferences, the establishment by WMO and the United Nations Environment Programme of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1988 and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1990. We continue to co-sponsor several observing systems aimed at providing scientific information and improved climate predictions and assessments to aid Governments in their commitments on the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases under the

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The WMO and its partner organizations also co-sponsored the Climate Agenda, which is designed to contribute to the future implementation and development of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Through the national meteorological and hydrological services of the world, the World Meteorological Organization continues to monitor ozone concentrations, the long-range transport of atmospheric pollutants, the acidity and toxicity of rain and atmospheric levels of aerosols. We are actively involved in the monitoring of the urban environment and in assisting the development of abatement policies. It was the World Meteorological Organization that issued the first warning on the depletion of the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere in 1975 and its possible environmental and health implications. That statement was followed by an international plan of action and scientific assessments by the World Meteorological Organization and partners that provided the basis for the conclusion of the Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in Vienna in 1985, its Montreal Protocol and subsequent amendments. The resulting reduction in ozone-depleting substances in the atmosphere represents a major success for the international community in the implementation of Agenda 21.

In relation to the implementation of chapter 12, on combating desertification, the WMO cooperates with agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in promoting the application of agrometeorological methods to improve land use, crop selection and land-management practices. As recurrent drought promotes desertification, the WMO continues to give support to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and to institutions such as the WMO-established Joint Monitoring Centres in Nairobi and Harare.

Another important activity of the WMO is the implementation of chapter 17, on the protection of the oceans. The many relevant WMO programmes include extensive ocean monitoring and a Marine Pollution Emergency Response Support System offers these services.

The Comprehensive Assessment of Freshwater Resources of the World, which has been considered by this special session, is the result of a study undertaken by the WMO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other agencies, in response to a request by the Commission on Sustainable Development. The study confirmed that there is insufficient knowledge of exactly how much water is available, which poses difficulties for its effective, rational management. In this regard, the World Meteorological Organization, with the support of the World Bank, initiated the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System to assist the national Hydrological Services of the world in addressing these difficulties.

Under the Agenda 21 action plan for sustainable development, the WMO has placed great emphasis on capacity-building and the transfer of appropriate and affordable technology to developing countries, countries with economies in transition and, in particular, to small island developing States. Sustainable development is adversely affected by natural disasters. The WMO therefore continues to assist the national meteorological and hydrological services to improve early-warning systems to mitigate natural disasters caused by tropical cyclones, hurricanes, floods, droughts and other extreme weather events. In this regard, there have been significant and measurable successes in many parts of the world. For this reason, the implementation of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction activities beyond the end of the decade should continue and be intensified.

Let me conclude by noting that in the overall implementation of UNCED's Agenda 21, significant progress has been made in some areas and notably less in others. I am pleased to have outlined the principal WMO contributions directed towards implementation of Agenda 21. What can we, then, look forward to in the next five years, after this special session of the General Assembly?

First, there is the need for stronger commitments by all countries of the world to the various conventions aimed at the protection of the earth's atmosphere and environment.

Second, Governments must transform those commitments from words into deeds.

Third, greater support for the networks monitoring the atmosphere, the hydrological cycle, water resources and the oceans, as well as research into environmental and climate change, is imperative in order to improve our scientific understanding and advice to Governments and policy-makers for the enhancement of their mitigation efforts.

Fourth, continuing strong support for the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is important.

Fifth, Governments will need to develop policies and action plans which build on the findings of the Comprehensive Assessment of the Freshwater Resources of the World.

Sixth, mitigation efforts against natural disasters should continue to be given very high priority.

Seventh, improvements need to be made in the dispersal of funds to support environmental projects and in the transfer of technology to developing countries for capacity-building activities. In this regard, the involvement of the private sector should be further encouraged.

Finally, the World Meteorological Organization will continue to give very high priority to developing new initiatives to further the implementation of Agenda 21 and we look forward to increased cooperation within the United Nations systems and at the national, regional and international levels.

The Acting President *(interpretation from Arabic)*: I thank the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization for his statement.

Mr. Godwin O.P. Obasi, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, was escorted from the rostrum.

Agenda item 3 *(continued)*

Credentials of representatives to the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly

(b) Report of the Credentials Committee (A/S-19/3 and Corr.1)

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): We shall now proceed to consider the draft resolution recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 12 of its report (A/S-1/3 and Corr.1).

The Credentials Committee adopted this draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted. (resolution S-19/1).

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): We have thus concluded our consideration of agenda item 3.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.